

Foundations: The Seventh Commandment Deuteronomy 5:18 (AFBC 10/9/16)

Have you noticed how the Ten Commandments often take us to places... that we were not really expecting to go? This is especially true once we take into account what Jesus said about them.

When He talked about adultery, for example, Jesus said it's not just the act itself that should concern us. To even look at another person in a lustful way is to break the seventh commandment.

At the same time, however, when the Pharisees brought to Him a woman caught in adultery, Jesus didn't condemn her. He forgave her; and then encouraged her not to fall victim to this sin again.

But to those who wanted to stone her, Jesus said, "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone." Our Lord surrounded this very difficult and painful issue with remarkable grace and mercy. We have a lot to learn, friends, from the way Jesus dealt with the woman, and from what He said to her accusers.

I ran across a cartoon that's sort of a commentary on our culture. Moses returns from his mountain top meeting with God. He says to the people, **"I've got good news and bad news--first, the good news. I talked God down from 21 commandments to just 10. The bad news is... He won't budge on number 7."**

In case you haven't looked, the seventh commandment says, **"You shall not commit adultery" (Deut. 5:18—our text today).**

Just taken at face value, I think it's likely that this commandment causes us more concern than last week's "You shall not murder" or next week's "You shall not steal." Statistics indicate there are more adulterers than there are murderers and robbers combined.

So let's just go ahead and say at the outset that this is a tough subject for us to talk about. It involves something we usually don't mention in church: namely, sex. Adultery is having sex with someone who, from God's perspective, we shouldn't.

That being said, when this topic is discussed around church, folks somehow get the impression we're against sex—but that's not right—is it? It's certainly not what the Bible teaches!

God is good, friends; and so is sex! God thought it up, after all—and no, God doesn't have a dirty mind. God gave this gift to Adam and Eve, and said "It's yours to enjoy. Be fruitful and multiply!"

And though our Catholic friends claim to believe that the only reason for sex is procreation, we know better. Scripture says that God gave us this gift not only to be enjoyed; He also gave us guidelines that, if followed, will help us enjoy this good gift fully.

We're talking about "Foundations." Have you seen those commercials for companies that will come to your house to repair its foundation—so the floors won't creak, and the dishes won't rattle when that young child walks into the room?

Well, when it comes to marriage, and adultery, and so many related issues, we have some serious foundation problems that need attention. We could spend all day looking at depressing statistics and wringing our hands; but let's go with something more positive, and, I trust, more in keeping with God's intentions.

Now, it's true that so much of what we find in the Bible concerning sex is expressed in negative terms. The word 'sexual' is used 31 times in Scripture, and 30 of these are followed up with the word "immorality"—as in "sexual immorality."

In the New Testament, the word for this is "porneia." That's where we get the word "pornography"—which is a far reaching problem. Porn has greatly complicated the issue of sexuality in our day.

The word 'adultery' appears thirty-five times in the Bible including right here in our text—and God never approves of it. Adultery gets in the way of our relationship with God and each other—because sin always affects both relationships.

But get this: there is no mention of adultery or any other kind of sexual immorality in Genesis 1 and 2. This matters because this is where God first reveals His plans for "the birds and the bees" and for us as well. God creates the man and woman, He brings them together; and then God says, "This is very good."

It's clear that God planned—from the beginning—for intimacy to be an important part of Adam and Eve's relationship. God knew that "it's not good for man to be alone." Of course, most of us men would agree.

God said, "I will make a helper FIT for him" (RSV). Some scholars suggest this little word "fit" should be taken literally—in a physical sense. Men and women fit together in a rather remarkable way—and that's no accident. It's by design--God's design!

Think of how God made the woman—not from the dust of the earth, as God made Adam. Instead, God puts the man into a deep sleep and takes a rib from his side. From this, He makes woman.

He brings Eve to Adam and explains to them that from now on, the two of them will complete one another—that *together...* they'll become one flesh in what we know as this nothing-else-in-the-whole-world-like-it relationship... called marriage.

They were both naked, and felt no shame. There was no reason to feel ashamed—these two were simply enjoying God's good gifts! Only after sin entered the world was there any shame related to their bodies or to their relationship with each other.

With the arrival of sin, however, this relationship--so vital to both male and female, so necessary for humankind to continue, so important for the care and nurturing of children, and so *foundational* to who God created us to be—this phenomenal relationship had to be set apart and protected from harm.

Do sexual relationships take place outside of marriage? Of course they do—and if you watch much TV, you might think that's where they usually happen. But that's not God's plan; and like everything else in our lives, this relationship is better when it's enjoyed according to His plan.

Again, God is good--and so is sex. But God's design for the enjoyment of this wonderful gift is called marriage—and no matter what our culture tries to convince us of otherwise, until God tells us different, marriage is His only design for this sexual union—the two becoming one flesh—this sacred relationship designed by God to be... a "perfect fit!"

For most of us, our need for physical intimacy is as natural as our need for food and breath. Granted, some of our needs are more immediate than others—we can't live for long without breathing—but the Bible actually says we shouldn't go too long without having other needs met as well.

I Corinthians 7:2-7 is a remarkable passage of Scripture. Listen: **“But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband. The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband.**

Let’s stop here for a moment. We may have preferred a word other than “duty” here—yet, we do need to know that when we sign up for marriage, this is one of the responsibilities we take on.

Now, hopefully we don’t think of sex with the love of our lives as a duty. It’s not like being drafted into the army, after all—but this is an important responsibility we assume when we marry.

Marriage should have an unselfish quality about it. Needs may vary—they usually do—but husbands and wives have a duty to satisfy each other sexually. I wouldn’t advise elbowing your spouse right now—but just make note of it: we have this responsibility within the bonds of matrimony—and... it’s all good!

Now listen to where this passage takes us: **v. 4: The wife’s body does not belong to her alone, but also to her husband.** No surprise there. In Biblical times, women were considered to be the property of their husbands—so, of course, her body was his!

But next comes the Gospel side of this—the message that changed the husband-wife relationship: **In the same way, the husband’s body does not belong to him alone, but also to his wife.**

Now, THAT was radical! It was more equal--more Christian! This is a difficult concept for some, but when we marry, our bodies become subject to something akin to “joint custody.”

We no longer have sole rights to our bodies. Within the bonds of marriage, we belong to one another!

Here’s why this is so important. Very early in marriage, couples often discover that one of the easiest ways for them to hurt their mate--in the sense of getting back or controlling them in some way--is to withhold affection. Yes, that does happen!

Sex can get to be more about power and control than lovemaking and meeting each other’s needs. This will put any marriage on a dangerous path—one that, I promise you, needs a quick change of

direction if that relationship is to have any chance of being, as God intends, “for as long as life shall last!”

We do not have the right, friends, to use sex as a bargaining chip or control mechanism. We relinquished that right when we took vows to “love, honor and cherish.” In that moment, we assumed a spiritual duty to love our spouse, to love their body, and to care for their sexual needs even as they, in turn, care for ours.

Marriage is a decision to join my life to the life of another person in a relationship that involves us in mutually serving and caring for one another. The two become one flesh in every aspect of life: emotionally, physically, mentally, and spiritually. And in all these arenas of life, we seek to build up each other and make life better.

When both the husband and the wife are committed to this kind of marriage, it leads to a relationship that’s so strong, so all-encompassing and mutually satisfying, that they want to do all they can to keep the relationship strong and to honor the vows they made to each other at the outset.

Do failures still happen? Yes, at times they do. Even in otherwise good marriages, adultery can still happen because every marriage involves two very imperfect people—two sinners who can still be tempted and who are not always at their best or their strongest.

We need that clear “Thou shalt not” found in the seventh commandment for those difficult times. It may be the only thing that gets us through them. But we’re far more likely to navigate these moments successfully if we have adhered to the great “Thou shalt” that are also provided for us in God’s word.

Listen as this passage from **I Corinthians 7** continues: **5 Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again (i.e., ‘make love to each other’) so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.**

Tempt you to do what? Well, to commit adultery. Bottom line, make sure you’re meeting this need for each other so completely that neither of you will be tempted to try to meet it in some other way—which inevitably ends up being destructive to our marriages, our families, and every other aspect of our lives.

The Bible doesn't just give us a commandment and tell us to abide by it or else—although this is how many people see Scripture: as just a bunch of rules. But the Bible also teaches us to nurture the marriage relationship so that it becomes something that's too precious and too wonderful to risk just throwing it away.

And when do these risks most often occur? When someone's need for intimacy is not being met as intended—within the marriage. Scripture says this unmet need makes us more vulnerable to temptation. Well, duhhhhh... of course it does.

Friends, we all need to feel loved—it's a foundational need. Within marriage, sexual intimacy is an important part of how we express our affection. Among other things, it helps us to *feel* loved.

Couples who've been through premarital counseling with me know that I stress to them their need to ask concerning their mate: "How can I make her feel loved? How can I make him feel loved?"

Not only are they to ask *themselves* this, but in many cases, they will need to ask *their mate* this question. This is not just about what happens in the bedroom either. It applies to all aspects of that couple's life together.

But if intimacy specifically is to be as mutually satisfying and enriching as God created it to be, hard as it is for some to talk about these things, they still need to be discussed. Remember, you're married. It's all good!

The question again: in their most intimate moments, how can each spouse make the other feel loved? But here's the thing. There's no selfishness in this. It's not a quest just to have one's own needs met. That will only lead to frustration, and perhaps to an even more selfish desire for something, or someone, new.

When both husband and wife are focusing on the needs of the other, however, they develop an intimacy that's mutually fulfilling, and a relationship that's powerfully resistant to temptation.

People are often surprised to learn there's so much about sex in the Bible. But the same God who tells us not to commit adultery also gives us clear instructions for building strong marriages that are not so susceptible to failure.

Sex is not the whole story here, but it is an important part of the story—again, by God’s design. The medical world recognizes the therapeutic value of sexual intimacy. It can bring feelings of comfort and reassurance.

But this isn’t anything new—it’s in the Bible! Listen to this verse—and you’ll need to listen closely--from Genesis 24: **“Isaac brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah (Sarah had recently died), and he married Rebekah. So she became his wife, and he loved her; and Isaac was comforted after his mother’s death.” (Genesis 24:67).**

Now this passage from Proverbs 5:

“Rejoice with the wife of your youth, as a loving hind and a graceful doe, let her breasts satisfy you at all times; be exhilarated always with her love.” (Proverbs 5:18-19).

So right here in Scripture, we find comfort, satisfaction, and exhilaration. It’s not just about having babies! There’s more to this “one flesh” relationship than we can begin to fathom—which is true for all of God’s good gifts to us.

We may resist God’s ways, but we do so much better when we choose to embrace them. They always lead us in the direction of life that’s abundant—rich, deep--and everlasting.

God is good, friends, and so is (what?) sex. When he created the man and the woman and gave them to each other, telling them to share in life fully, completely, and intimately as husband and wife, God considered what He had done, and said, “It’s very good.”

I agree. I hope you do too. If you’re married, thank God for that person who has chosen, for better or for worse, to share their life with you—to be “one flesh” with you.

Ask God to help you love them, cherish them, and to make your relationship all that He intends for it to be. Ask God also to keep you from falling into any kind of temptation that would run the risk of destroying this remarkable gift that He’s given you! Amen.